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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 TAIPEI 001627

SENSITIVE  
SIPDIS

STATE PASS USTR, STATE FOR EAP/TC,ECA/A/E/EAP, EAP/PD,USTR  
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SUBJECT: TAIWAN PREPARES TO ADMIT PRC UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

REF: A. TAIPEI 1530  
1B. TAIPEI 1569  
1C. TAIPEI 1584

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11. (SBU) Summary. On November 10, Education Minister Cheng Jei-ching announced that, beginning with the fall semester in 2009, Taiwan's colleges, universities and graduate schools will begin accepting up to 1,000 students per year from the PRC. Increasing cross-Straight contacts by opening Taiwan to Mainland students was a platform of President Ma Ying-jeou's campaign, but the details of how the policy will be implemented suggest that protecting job opportunities for Taiwan students is also a high priority for Ma's administration. Minister Cheng stated that "three limitations and six noes" will apply to PRC students studying in Taiwan, restricting the study of certain subjects as well as students' options for employment while in school and after graduation. Taiwan has almost one million undergraduate students, so the actual impact on the island's undersubscribed post-secondary educational system of the small number of PRC students is likely to be minimal. End Summary.

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Students to be Admitted Starting Next Fall  
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12. (SBU) On November 10, Education Minister Cheng Jei-ching announced that, beginning with the fall semester in 2009, Taiwan's colleges, universities and graduate schools will begin accepting students from the PRC. Initially, the number of students accepted will be limited to 1,000, but Minister Cheng told AIT that the number could ultimately increase to a maximum of one percent of the number of new college entrants (Note: typically, more than 200,000 freshmen per year enroll in Taiwan's universities and colleges. End Note.) Cheng said the limit will be reviewed two years after the new policy takes effect. The Ministry of Education (MOE) has yet to work out how the quota will be divided among Taiwan's various institutions of higher education, according to Wang Kung-sheng, the Director of the Cultural and Educational Exchange Department of the Mainland Affairs Council (MAC).

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## Background

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¶13. (SBU) In 1988, Taiwan began to invite professionals from China to come to the island for short-term cultural and educational exchanges, including post-graduate scientific research. In October this year, Taiwan extended the limit on the length of stay for Chinese students doing research here from four months to one year. According to MOE, there are 342 students from the PRC currently doing research in Taiwan.

By comparison, Taiwan's National Security Council estimates there are approximately 6,500 Taiwan students studying in China, and approximately 20,000 students have gone to the Mainland since Beijing removed restrictions on Taiwan students 15 years ago. (Note: Taiwan does not keep statistics on the number of students from the island who go to the Mainland to study. End Note.) In 2002, Taiwan first allowed Taiwan universities to provide executive MBA (EMBA) programs to the PRC staff of Taiwan firms operating in China.

There are nine Taiwan universities that now provide EMBA programs on the Mainland. In October Taiwan allowed Chinese students to enroll in EMBA programs offered on the offshore islands of Kinmen, Matsu and Penghu.

¶14. (SBU) Allowing Mainland students to come to Taiwan for post-secondary education was part of the campaign platform of President Ma Ying-jeou, which emphasized improving cross-Straight relations. Educational exchange, as well as increased cross-Straight tourism, were portrayed by Ma's campaign as a way to enhance stability through people-to-people ties. The details about implementation of the new policy announced by Minister Cheng indicate that there will be a strong emphasis on protecting job opportunities for Taiwan graduates and preventing a major

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influx of PRC students who would seek jobs here after graduating.

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## Three Limitations and Six Noes

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¶15. (SBU) According Minister Cheng, PRC students would be restricted from studying subjects related to national security, high-technology and medicine. MAC educational exchange director Wang told AIT that MOE is reviewing which courses at Taiwan's various colleges and universities would be prohibited for Mainland students. MOE is also reviewing Chinese university curricula to determine which degrees from Mainland universities will be recognized in Taiwan, according to Wang.

¶16. (SBU) Chinese students will face restrictions in regard to application, enrollment and employment. The "six noes" include no part-time work off-campus, no employment in Taiwan directly after graduation, no access to the island's universal health insurance system, and no scholarships offered by MOE. The policy, however, will not prevent universities and colleges, as well as private enterprises, from awarding scholarships directly. In addition, Mainland students who take Taiwan's compulsory university entrance examinations will not be accorded extra points, as are "overseas Chinese" students and those who are members of the island's aboriginal tribes. PRC students will also not be allowed to take examinations for professional certification, for example to become a CPA. They will be allowed to work part-time on-campus, for example as teaching assistants. Schools will be responsible for providing students from the PRC with group health insurance.

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## Implementation Details

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¶17. (SBU) MAC's Wang told AIT recently that MAC is working

with MOE to draft implementing regulations and an amendment to Article 22 of the Act Governing Relations between Peoples of the Taiwan Area and the Mainland Area. This article states that rules governing recognition of PRC educational certificates must be developed by MOE and submitted to the Executive Yuan for approval. The amendment to the act will require approval by the Legislative Yuan (LY). Wang said that MAC and MOE expect that the process can be completed by next fall, in order to allow PRC students to enroll in the fall semester. In July, MOE began consulting with schools and education experts on how the policy should be implemented, so the ministry anticipates that the LY will pass the required amendment, according to Wang.

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What Will it Mean for Taiwan?  
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¶8. (SBU) MAC optimistically estimates that as many as 5 million PRC students may wish to come to Taiwan. However, by limiting the number of students allowed to enroll to 1,000 per year, the Ma administration is proceeding cautiously on expanding cross-Strait educational exchange. According to sources in academia, the actual impact of the new policy on the island's post-secondary educational system is likely to be minimal. Professor Wang Dau-chang, who is the Director of the Office of International Affairs at National Yunlin University of Science and Technology, told AIT recently that the new policy will not significantly affect the island's major colleges and universities, where competition for admission is already keen. Wang's opinion was echoed by Professor Chung Tsung-ting, who heads the university's EMBA program. Yunlin County Deputy Magistrate Li Ying-yuan told us separately that, in his view, because most Taiwan universities have higher tuition levels than those in China, only a limited number of PRC students would apply to study here.

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¶9. (SBU) With over 160 universities and colleges on the island, a university seat is virtually assured for any Taiwan high school graduate who wants one. At the same time, Taiwan's college student pool is gradually shrinking, according to Professor Huang Chin-tan of Mingchuan University's graduate school of management. Dr. Huang told us that he estimates the total number of students entering tertiary education will be approximately 20,000 less than current levels by 2015. He added that colleges and universities in central and southern Taiwan, in particular, could face a shortage of students in the future, and therefore, in his view, allowing Mainland students to study in Taiwan is a sound policy.

¶10. (SBU) MAC officials say that the next round of talks between the Straits Exchange Foundation (SEF) and the PRC's Association for Relations Across the Taiwan Strait (ARATS) could address issues related to educational exchange, for example establishing a regular channel for communication between education officials on both sides of the Strait. MAC's Ms. Wang told us, though, that Taiwan and PRC officials had not yet agreed on whether to include education issues on the agenda for the SEF-ARATS talks next year.

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Comment  
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¶11. (SBU) Criticism of the Ma administration's moves to increase economic ties with China (reflets), combined with public concern about rising unemployment, may explain the various restrictions on PRC students included in the new policy. Although the immediate impact of policy change on Taiwan's educational system may be slight, in the long-term, enrolling Chinese students may help the island's less prestigious universities reduce pressure from a declining

Taiwan student pool. Another factor Ma must consider is the general hostility on the part of his DPP opposition to this administration's opening to China. In the current political climate, there is likely to be some opposition as the decision is implemented. End Comment.

SYOUNG